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Life is Worth Giving

BREAKING FOOD SEDUCTION IS KEY TO HEALTHY DIETING

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

It seems that virtually every week the news media publishes a new and startling story about a new type of diet that guarantees the shedding of pounds and the beginning of a new lifestyle and spiritual and physical outlook. This is usually followed by depressing news that Americans continue to gain weight, and the percentage of obese men, women and children continues to rise inexorably. Many factors, both spiritual and physical, are blamed for this — including a diet filled with fatty foods, lack of exercise, and a lack of knowledge of healthy foods which enable us to return to acceptable weights.

In an attempt to help, publishers produce book after book of new and better ways of losing weight. TV shows and other media outlets ballyhoo various diets and medications — all to little or no avail. But in the midst of all this frustrating activity, many people simply give up and eat their way into poor health and a shortened lifespan. Others try prayer and meditation as a way to dieting. But little seems to work.

Such consequences tend to make many more than skeptical about new diets and approach them with great caution.



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Then along comes a book entitled "Breaking the Food Seduction" by Dr. Neal Barnard. His book is subtitled "The Hidden Reasons Behind Food Cravings — and 7 Steps to End Them Naturally."

The word "naturally" seems to indicate a new approach to dieting without costly medications and eating plans to buy various types of foods. Most people are drawn to fattening foods that seem irresistible, and these are generally the ones that destroy our sincere efforts to diet and thereby improve our health. These fattening foods are winning the dietary wars by discouraging people with frequent failures to abstain from them.

Much of the difficulty in such failures can be traced to the fact that overweight people are fighting the battle in the wrong place. The author, a physician and a leading health researcher, explains that eliminating these cravings for unhealthy foods is not a question of willpower or psychology, but simply a matter of biochemistry. This is rather good news to those who are feeling guilty, and blaming themselves for dietary failures. But overcoming such is entirely simple and without a sincere commitment on the part of overweight people.

Based on the author's research, including that of other leading investigators in the field, the book reveals <sup>(THAT)</sup> ~~the~~ diet and lifestyle changes that make it possible for people to break the stubborn craving cycles for unhealthy and fattening foods.

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These usually spell disaster and discouragement for many dieters, no matter how sincere and great their efforts.

The author asks the reader to set aside that eating habits are simply a person's "fault" and that the only answer is greater willpower. Science now has a much more accurate and practical understanding of what it is about chocolate, cheese and similar foods that keep the average dieter in a type of bondage and then demystifies their addictive nature and how to re-assert control over diets.

The author also states clearly that whatever our family history, one thing is clear: genes are not destiny. A person can overcome the addictive properties of food through bolstering his or her physical resilience. Healthy foods are capable of turning on that "feel good" dopamine system that is the root of unhealthy cravings. And the same can be said of exercise on a regular basis.

In addition, the taste for meat may be similar to the taste for French fries, onion rings, or anything else with a good deal of fat in it. This is due to evolutionary pressures leading us to prefer high-calorie foods. What appears to be happening is that, as meat touches a person's tongue, opiates are released in the brain as a reward, and this propels the eater towards making it a habit. But the author strongly suggests that meat, cheese and similar products be left out of a person's diet with great benefits to overall health.



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Dr. Barnard also takes to task the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other groups for supplying school lunch programs with meat and other products which are detrimental to the diets of children. Even the USDA's "Eating Right Pyramid" needs to feature more vegetables, fruits and grains to help those many Americans hooked on meat which causes many health problems.

Low-fat foods don't just tend to increase the amount of the appetite-taming hormone Leptin which can help dieters resist the seduction of unhealthy foods and live a better life. And this comes from low-fat foods which don't just tend to increase the amount of Leptin in a person's blood but also boosts its ability to work.

Nor does Dr. Barnard want people to starve themselves to lose weight. He offers the "Rule of Ten" for each person, i.e., take normal or average weight and multiply by 10 to get the number of calories needed each day. Cutting back drastically on calorie intake is a prescription for disaster. Also, exercise makes the body respond better to Leptin.

Oddly enough, the author adds that the first rule for weight loss is to avoid dieting, that is, ~~the~~ old-fashioned calorie counting. It is far better to break the craving cycles. It is also important to recognize when cravings normally occur in our daily eating patterns, especially towards evening.

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The keys to breaking out of these unhealthy patterns may surprise many. Willpower plays virtually no role at all, while timing and biology matter a lot.

Taste buds, the author concludes, have a memory of about three weeks, and people can exploit this fact to change their diets. When changing, for example, from whole milk to skim milk, after three weeks the taste buds will reject the whole in favor of the thin.

The book is replete with practical suggestions to help a person lose weight and maintain a healthy and energetic lifestyle. Charts of various foods and their calorie content, plus healthy diet recipes add much to the book's value with an entire section of suggestions of healthy substitutions for unhealthy foods that lessen our true enjoyment of life.

(Fr. Kevin Shanley)